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TAGS: [KJUS](#) [KCRM](#) [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: EASTERN CARIBBEAN DRAGGING FEET ON DEPORTEE
RETURNS: HICCUP OR TREND?

Classified By: Ambassador Mary M. Ourisman, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (c) In recent weeks, we have become aware of a string of cases in which prospective deportees from Eastern Caribbean (EC) countries have been unable to return to their country of citizenship because of delays from their U.S.-based consulates in processing required travel documents. As a result of these delays, some deportees have been released in the U.S. What at first appeared to be isolated cases of bureaucratic inefficiency at EC Missions in the U.S. responsible for providing travel documents for deportees to be returned is beginning to look more like deliberate stalling tactics by some of these missions testing a potential loophole in U.S. laws requiring deportees to be removed within 180 days of confinement or released. If the trend continues and deportation is slowed in the process, we could see a sharp increase in Caribbean deportees being released in the U.S., which could quickly become an irritant in our bilateral relationships. End summary.

TRIAL BALLOONS

12. (c) Grumbling about the USG's policy on criminal deportees is nothing new. Senior officials in virtually every country in the region have complained publicly and privately about returning criminal deportees since the policy was launched in the mid-1990's. The recent U.S. elections launched a new volley of complaints from the region, which has rekindled hopes for a review of U.S. deportation policy. Recently, however, our A/RSO was asked by a senior contact in Vincentian law enforcement what the USG response would be if, hypothetically, Caribbean governments stopped accepting deportees back into their countries of citizenship. Within a few weeks of this "hypothetical" query, we saw an instance of a Dominican deportee being unable to secure necessary travel documents from his consulate in New York to provide entry back into Dominica. A few weeks later, there was another case involving St. Lucia, and we are now hearing that there are three additional cases, one each from Dominica, St. Kitts, and St. Vincent. In all of these cases, there have been a series of "problems" with the documentation provided by USG law enforcement and the deportees to prove their citizenship.

13. (c) It is not uncommon for the bureaucratic paper trail to take some time to complete in the Eastern Caribbean, due to inflexible civil service procedures, a lack of consistency from one official to the next, and simple inefficiency. In recent cases, though, these slowdowns have started to appear deliberate. In one case, a notarized copy of a birth certificate for a deportee was returned to USG law enforcement and an original requested. When this was provided, it was sent back to the country of origin for "authentication" by another ministry -- a process that has taken several months.

IMPLICATIONS

14. (c) According to DHS/ICE, there are over 1300 Eastern Caribbean citizens in the deportee pipeline, including some 377 criminal deportees and many with "simple" overstays. Absent the ability to repatriate them in a timely manner, ICE is required to release them back into the general U.S. population. If, in fact, the recent cases represent a willful attempt by EC governments to dodge their national responsibility to take back their deported citizens, it would represent not only a breach of their international obligations, but also a serious irritant in our relationship on an issue that is sensitive to both sides. We have begun to engage regional leaders, urging them to meet their international obligations to accept deported nationals and to minimize such delays, in order to ensure that this mini-trend does not gain momentum. We have also cautioned that

continued delays could generate negative reactions on Capitol Hill, where interest in immigration issues runs high.

COMMENT

15. (c) The broader point that is often lost in the region's obsessive focus on deportation and its alleged - though never proven - impact on local crime levels, is that deportation is an unfortunate by-product of our open immigration system and our openness to visitors from the region. Countries in the region desperately want to ensure continued open access to immigration and visits to the U.S. But they will need to understand that such access is only possible if all sides respect international commitments and facilitate the return of nationals who break the law - just as they do within their borders.

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